

Thesis in English

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THE CHARACTER OF EMELYE IN CHAUCER, BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER, AND DRYDEN.

Geoffrey Chaucer is the first English writer to introduce to us the story of the love of the Theban cousins, Palamon and Arcite, for Emelye, sister to Hippolyta wife of Theseus. In Chaucer's Knights Tale, as in all other writers on the same subject, the Character of Emelye is as nearly flawless as one can imagine. It is evident throughout the story that Chaucer wished to emphasize the characters of Palamon and Arcite, and hence subordinated that of Emelye to assure the subject. Nevertheless, although a meagre account of her is given, it is quite definite enough to allow us a glimpse of some interesting points in her character.

She is, first of all, represented as a devotee of nature especially in the period of beauty. The passage bearing on this characteristic is as follows: -

"Til it fil ones, in a morwe of May,
That Emelye, that fairer was to sene
Than is the lillie upon his stalke grene,
And fressher than the May with floures newe
For with the rose colour stroof hir hewe,
I noot which was the fairer of hem two-
Er it were day, as was hir wone to-do,
She was arisen and already dight;
For May wol have no slogardye a-night.
And maketh him ont of his sleep to sterte,
And seith, 'Arys, and do thyn observaunce',
This maked Emelye have remembrance
To doon honour to May, and for to-ryse.

Y-clothed was she fresh, for to devyse;
Hir yellow heer was broyded in a tresse,
Behinde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse.
And in the gardin, at the sonne up-riste,
She walketh up and down, and as hir liste
She gadereth floures, party whyte and rede,
To make a sotil gerland for hir hede,
And as an aungel heavenly she song.
The grete tour, that was so thikke and strong,
Whick of the castel was the chief dongeoun,
(Ther-as the Knightes weren in prisoun,
Of whiche I tolde yow, and tellen shal)
Was evene joynant to the gardin-wal,
Ther-as this Emelye hadde hir pleyinge;
Bright was the sonne, and cleer that morweninge.

In this description of an energetic girl wandering in the garden in the early morning, weaving flowers into garlands, and singing to her-self, we see an abandon to the delights of the May season that stamps her as truly feminine in her love of cultivated objects in Nature. She is not of a pale delicate type but ruddy with health gained by association with outdoor life.

Another trait of Emelye's character is hinted at in Arcite's monologue in the forest when he says: -

"Ye sleen me with your eyen, Emelye ;
Ye been the cause wherfor that I dye."

As Arcite had, at that time, been in close proximity to Emelye for several years, as "Page of Chambre of Emelye the brighte", he had certainly observed her very closely. His complaint is therefore not of any intentional cruelty

on her part but of a beauty and purity of character expressed through the eyes which was slowly killing him because of the apparent impossibility of his ever marrying her.

As a one time Amazon we should expect certain martial characteristics in this maid, but there is only one hint of any departure from the utmost gentleness. This occurs in the account of the hunt organized by Theseus on another May morn :-

"And Theseus, with alle joye and blis,
With his Ipolita, the fayre quene,
And Emelye clothed al in grene,
On hunting be they riden royally,"

Emelye clad in green, the color of the foresters, hunting the deer would not appeal to us as very gentle, but Chaucer is representing her, not as a woman of our age, nor as one of the period in which she is supposed to have existed, but as a woman of his own day and they delighted in hunting and even in beholding bloody spectacles such as the tournaments often were.

Her real gentleness appears in her appeal, on that same day, to Theseus after condemnation had been pronounced on the cousins :-

"The quene anon, for verray wommanhede,
Gan for to wepe, and so dide Emelye,
And alle the ladies in the companye."

This follows immediately upon her discovery of the secret love the two Cousins have been cherishing for her for over two years, and might have been attributed to the natural tenderness of any woman induced by devotion to herself, but she seems to have cared only to save the lives of two men condemned to die for an offense so pardonable in a woman's eyes.

The subordinate part played by the heroine in the Knights Tale is shown by her non-appearance from this time until the morning of the

deciding combat when she visits the temple of Diana. It is in this account that Chaucer gives the best picture of her most inmost feelings. After carefully observing the proper rites Emelye prays to Diana thus :-

" O chaste goddesse of the wodes grene,
To whom bothe heven and erthe and see is sene,
Quene of the regne of Pluto derk and lowe,
Goddesse of maydens, that myn herte hast knowe
For many a yeer, and woost what I desire,
As me fro thy vengauce and thyn ire,
That Attheon abroughte cruelly.
Chaste goddesse, wel wostow that I
Desire to been a mayden al my lyf,
Ne never wol I be no love ne wyf.
I am, thou woost, yet of thy companye,
A mayde, and love hunting and venerye,
And for to walken in the wodes wilde,
And nocht to been a wyf, and be with childe.
Noght wol I know companye of man.
Now help me , lady, sith ye may and can,
For the three formes that thow hast in thee.
And Palamon, that hath swich love to me,
And eek Arcite, that loveth me so sore,
This grace I preye thee with-onte more,
As sende love and pees biitwixe hem two;
And fro me turne away hir hertes so,
That al hir hote love, and hir desyr,
And all hir hote love, and hir desyr,
And all hir bisy torment and hir fyr

Be queynt, or turned in another place ;
 And if so be thow wolt not do me grace.
 Or if my destinee be shapen so,
 That I shal nedes have con of hem two,
 As sende me him that most desireth me.
 Bihold, goddesse of clene chastitee,
 The bittre teres that on my chekes falle.
 Sin thow are mayde, and keeper of us alle,
 My maydenhede thow kepe and wel conserve,
 And whyl I live a mayde, I wol thee serve."

Her first desire is to marry no one but to live like Diana devoted to chastity and engaged in hunting. If this cannot be granted, she wishes to wed the one who loves her most. When the goddess answers her prayer informing her that she must marry one of the two she shows her submission to the will of the deity thus :-

"For which this Emelye astoned was,
 And seyde 'what amounteth this, allas!
 I putte me in thy proteccioun,
 Diana, and in thy disposicioun.' "

The religious spirit of the maid is apparent all through the scene in the temple and her reliance on the goddess who protects maidenhood is complete and pathetic. She is also shown here as a girl satisfied with her lot and desirous of continuing in known ways rather than venture rashly into an untried way of life. Nor does she fail to think unselfishly of others as a petition for a cessation of trouble between Palamon and Arcite shows.

Later in the same day Emelye was present at the tournament, and, until the victory of Arcite is assured, she is absolutely neutral. There is not a hint of any feeling she may have for either of the cousins prior to that time.

She submits to the dictates of Theseus, as any well bred lady of Chaucer's day would obey her father, but forms no opinion of her own. However, when Arcite parades before the royal pavilion in the pride of victory,

"Looking upward from this Emelye: B

she thus repays him: -

"And she agayn him cast a freendlich ye,

(For women as to speken in commune,

They folwen al the favour of fortune);

And she was al his chere as in his herte."

From this time until Arcite's death Emelye seems to have considered herself his wife. On his death bed he assigns her to Palamon, but his last thought was of her, and

" His laste word was 'mercy Emelye'! "

She showed all the sorrow of a bereaved wife, as Chaucer says,

" What helpeth it to tarien forth the day

To tellen how she weep, both eve and morwe ? "

At the funeral pyre she applied the torch as next of kin and afterwards swooned from the horror of it. All this indicates a deep tenderness in her nature that led her to comfort the dying moments of the man whose love of her had been so great; and his continued devotion shows that he had seen no defect in her character even as her servant who would naturally see all of phases of her character.

After an interval of several years Theseus summons Palamon from Thebes, and brings about his union with Emelye which results happily,

"And thus with alle blisse and melodye

Hath Palamon Y-wedded Emelye.

And God that al this wyde world hath wrought,

Send him his love, that hath it dere a-bought.

For now is Palamon in alle wele,
Living in blisse in richesse, and in hele;
And Emelye him loveth so tendrely,
And he hir serveth al-so gentilly,
That never was ther no word hem bitwene
Of jelousye, or anybother tene."

All of the story following the tournament shows Emelye as the obedient, gentle, even tempered, ward of Theseus. Her ready consent to the marriage with Arcite and later submission to the transfer to Palamon, and even her happy wedded life indicate a docile spirit little known today but commonly found among both the Greeks and the English of Chaucer's time.

To sum up Chaucer's delineation of Emelye's character, she is a lover of nature in both the cultivated garden and the woodland; she is one whose beauty and purity of character are reflected from her eyes; her gentleness and compassionate nature are apparent whenever occasion arises for their exhibition; the religious devotion of her nature expresses itself in her worship of Diana as the goddess of purity and hunting; lastly, her unselfish obedient nature is carried to such an extent as almost to appear weakness to modern eyes although consistent with the ideals of the times in which she lived.

Beaumont and Fletcher in the Two Noble Kinsmen treat the same story of Emilia from a dramatic viewpoint. As the tendency of their work was towards the impure or, at least suggestive, we may look for a weakening of the character of the heroine. This is true, to a slight extent, but the purity of the original conception so influenced them that the play is one of the few readable plays produced by these joint authors. For purposes of dramatic effect they make Emilia a more prominent figure than we found her

Chaucer.

The one characteristic of Emilia emphasized throughout the Two Noble Kinsmen is that of womanly sympathy. She is madetto interwene in the scene of the windows pleading with Theseus to rescue the bodies of their royal husbands from Creon of Thebes. She seconds their petition and Hippolyta's in these words :-

" If you grant not
My Sister her petition, in that force
With that clerity and nature, which
She makes it in, from henceforth I'll not dare
To ask you anything, nor be so hardy
Ever to take a husband."

This ready sympathy is again shown in the forest scene when Palamon and Arcite are discovered in furious combat. Here she pleads for Theseus to pardon the offenders although he has sworn they shall die. Her answer to his statement that he cannot break his oath is a good one :-

"Oh, my noble brother,
That oath was rashly made, and in your anger;
Your reason will not hold it! If such vows
Stand for express will, all the world must perish.
Beside I have another oath 'gainst yours,
Of more authority. I am sure more love;
Not made in passion neither, but good heed."

She then reminds him of his promise to deny her nothing fit for her "modest suit", and further shows that their death will be blamed on her as the moving cause. This impassioned and logical appeal has the effect of moderating Theseus' anger and giving the lovers a respite.

Probably the best illustration of this sympathetic nature is in her refusal to be present at the combat to decide which lover was to marry her and which to die. She speaks thus to Pirithous :-

" I had rather see a wren hawk at a fly,
 Than this decision: every blow that falls
 Threats a brave life ; Each stroke laments
 The place whereon it falls, and sounds more like
 A bell than blade: I will stay here:
 It is enough, my hearing shall be punish'd
 With what shall ('gainst the which there is
 No deafing), but to hear, not taint mine eye
 With dread sights it may shun."

Even at Theseus's command she refuses to attend the combat showing a certain independence of spirit entirely lacking in the Emelye of Chaucer. Thus throughout the play she is represented as hating cruelty and bloodshed, and yet firm enough to comfort Arcite by her presence and ministrations after his injury until his death.

Another variation from Chaucer's idea is shown in the secret preference Emilia shows for Arcite. It is true that, in comparing their pictures before the rivals come to Athens to contest for her, she first praises her Arcite and then Palamon, wavering between them. Again, in her prayer to Diana on the day set for the combat, she prays for the success of the one who loves her most. At the last, however, in the midst of the strife, she listens anxiously to the cry of the spectators, and, when the cry rises, "Palamon!"

She thus exclaims of Arcite:-

"Poornservant, thou hast lost!
 Upon my side still I wore thy picture,
 Palamon's on the left: Why so, I know not;

I I had no end in'st else; chance would have it so:
On the sinister side the heart lies; Palamon
Had the best-boding chance."

And later when assured of Arcite's victory she exclaims:-

"I did think

Good Palamon would miscarry; yet I knew not
Why I did think so: Our reasons are not prophets,
When oft our fancies are ."

This preference for one is more in accord with feminine nature than the impartial attitude attributed to her by Chaucer.

A touching feature of Emilia's character is brought out in the play in Emilia's account of her strong attachment to Flavina. A woman without a bosom friend is rare and Emilia's love for Flavina, her childhood companion, was an evidence of this tendency in later years. This is brought out in the following answer of Emilia to Hippolita in a discussion of the friendship of Theseus and Pirithous:-

"You talk of Pirithous' and Theseus' love:

Theirs has more ground, is more naturely season'd,
More buckled with strong judgment, and their needs
The one of the other may be said to water
Their intangled roots of love; but I,
And she I sigh and spoke of, were things innocent,
Eov'd for we did, and like the elements
That know not what nor why, yet do effect
Rare issues by their operance, our souls
Did so to one another: What she lik'd
Was then of me approv'd; what not, condemn'd,
No more arraignment"

Her conclusion that such a love is more satisfying than that between the sexes. This is the nearest approach to man-hating that Emilia makes in the Two Noble Kinsmen

The wisdom of Emilia is hinted at by Theseus in the scene in which he assigns Arcite as her servant, when he says:-

" Sister, beshrew my heart, you have a servant
That, if I were a woman, would be master:
But you are wise."

Emilia answers.

"I hope too wise for that, sir."

This wisdom is shown not only in her circumspect conduct, but in the clarity of her reasoning in several parts of the play. The best instance is in her interposition in favor of Palamon and Arcite in the forest scene, part of which has been quoted above. She argues thus to Theseus after recalling his promise to grant any modest desire she may express:-

"I tie you to your word now; if you fail in't,
Think how you maim your honor
(For now I am set a-begging sir, I am deaf
To all but your compassion); how their lives
Might breed the ruin of my name's opinion!
Shall any thing that loves me perish for me?
That were a cruel wisdom: do men proin
The straight young boughs that blush with thousands blossoms,
Because they may be rotten ? Oh, Duke Theseus,
The goodly mothers that have groaned for these
And all the longing maids that ever lov'd,
If ybur vow stand, shall curse me and my beauty;
And in their funeral songs for these two cousins,

Despise my cruelty, and cry woe-worth~~me~~ ,
Till I am nothing but the scorn of women!

For heaven's sake save their lives and banish them! "

This is certainly a complete answer to Theseus' statement that either one or both must die as the two lovers could not live at peace with one another. Emilia is shown to have great power of foresight through her knowledge of woman and of mankind in general. Her independence of thought is again apparent in the determined stand she takes for the right.

Still a different phase of Emilia's character comes out when she finds that Palamon is to be executed according to the conditions of the combat. She then exclaims :-

"Is this winning ?

Oh, all you heavenly powers, where is your mercy ?

But that your wills have said it must be so,

And charge me live to comfort this unfriended;

This miserable prince, that cut away

A life more worthy from him than all women,

I should and would die too."

A belief in fore-ordination, nearly approaching fatalism, is shown here and a peculiar view of happiness is added . She regards Arcite as miserable because he gains his desire at the expense of the life of his sworn comrade. She is quite modern in her thought that no real happiness can be gained at the expense of the suffering of another.

The weakening of Emilia's character is apparent in only one place, the garden scene, in Act Two, Scene Two, on the May morn. It is evident in the following dialogue with her waiting room.

Emi. :- "Of all flowers

Methinks, a rose is best."

Wait. - w. :- "Why gentle madam ?"

Emi. :- "It is the very emblem of a maid:

For when the west wind courts her gently,
How modestly she blows, and paints the sun
With her chaste blushes! When the north comes near her,
Rude and impatient; then like Chastity,
She locks her beauties in her bud again,
And leaves him to base briars. "

Wait.- w.- "Yet good madam,

Sometimes her modesty will blow so far
She falls for it: a maid,
If she have any honor, would be loath
To take example by her."

Emi. :-

"Thow art wanton. "

In this Emilia shows a vivid imagination, and her thought is a beautiful one, but the waiting-woman spoils it, carrying the comparison too far. Emilia gives only a slight reproof for her wantonness and endures further speeches, throughout the scene, which border on vulgarity. The fact that the waiting-woman ventured so far indicates that she judged her mistress was secretly enjoying her suggestions, even when her speech reproved them. This is fortunately the only objectionable scene of the play and is lost sight in the contemplation of its many good parts.

The character of Emilia as pictured by Beaumont and Fletcher shows her as pure, gentle, and compassionate as in Chaucer. They have developed her character more fully than Chaucer, emphasizing the sympathetic womanliness of her nature. They have even ventured to add some touches to her character

such as the secret preference for Arcite, her strong attachment for a deceased friend of her girlhood days, and consequent disapproval of union with the other sex, wisdom in action and speech, a belief in fore-ordination, and a great independence of spirit than Chaucer allows her. The slight weakness shown in the Second Scene of the Second Act is not at all in keeping with the character of Emilia as delineated in the remainder of the play.

As Dryden's palamon and Arcite is in fact only a free translation of Chaucer's Knightes Tale, we may expect little difference between Chaucer's and Dryden's characterization of the heroine. This proves true in a general way, but Dryden adds somewhat to the purely human qualities of Emily, as he spells the name. It will be necessary only to call attention to these additions to see how Dryden has raised her from a subordinate position to a more important one.

The first noticeable difference is in the description of the return of Theseus to Athens after his marriage to Hippolyta. He records the storm, as does Chaucer, but adds :-

"The storm at their return, the ladies fear: "

This reference to the feminine dread of storms, while a very natural one, was not included by Chaucer, yet is as true to the character of the generality of women as can well be imagined.

Another variation is in the woodland scene after the duel when Theseus has expressed his judgment, and Palamon and Arcite have been dismissed to gather their Champions. Chaucer allows them to go without any encouragement from the lady, but Dryden says:-

" The knights, with leave

Departing from the place, his last commands receive,

On Emily with equal ardor look,
And from her eyes their inspiration took."

Although Chaucer represents Emelye as altogether impartial, and rather discouragingly cold, Dryden here allows us to gather that each felt some encouragement from the glance she gave them. Knowing the coquetry of the feminine heart, best expressed through the eye, we cannot but feel the humanizing touch in this passage.

In the scene in the temple of Diana on the morning of the day appointed for the deciding combat, Emily is represented by Dryden much as by Chaucer. Dryden however adds two things. He represents the lady as a man-hater in the petition to Diana:-

"Like death thou know'st, I loathe the nuptial state,
And man the tyrant of our sex, I hate,
A lowly servant, but a lofty mate;
Where love is duty on the female side,
On theirs mere sensual gust, and sought with surly pride."

This sentiment seems unworthy of a pure innocent girl such as Emily is and Dryden might well have followed Chaucer literally here. The second attempted improvement has a better result although rather contradictory of Emily's recently expressed hatred of men. It runs thus: -

"Then sighing she returned; but smiled betwixt,
With hopes, and fears, and joys with sorrows mixed."

Where a woman has just expressed deep hatred of men, we would hardly look for such a display of pleasure after being informed by the goddess that she must marry one of the contestants for her favor.

The only other radical departure from Chaucer's characterization to be found in Dryden is in the closing speech of Theseus, when he says :-

"Pity is heaven's and yours, nor can she find

A throne so soft as in a woman's mind.'

He said; she blushed; and as o'er awed by might,

Seemed to give Theseus what she gave the knight."

Chaucer, in keeping with his meagre details in describing Emelye, omits such points as this. "Pity" and blushing" are associated with women from time immemorial, and this was a time when both were introduced most were introduced most appropriately to show the gentleness and modesty of Emily's character.

Thus Dryden pictured Emily with much the same characteristics as does Chaucer, but adds a dread of storms, a less impartial treatment of her lovers, a hatred of man and a womanly pity and capacity for blushing.

Although the later attempts to delineate the character of Emelye were also efforts to improve on the original as depicted in Chaucer both attempts were failures in that respect. Chaucer gives us a beautiful outline of womanly perfection. With the facts as given in the Knights Tale we have sufficiently concrete material for our imagination to play upon and complete the portrait. The later writers, in their effort to give us more particulars in her character, have somewhat spoiled the perfection we would naturally imagine from Chaucer's work. If any fault be found with the lack of detail in Chaucer's description of Emelye we can retort that he leaves no blemish on her character, and we can imagine only the best.